

Our Normal by Ellie603

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Summary:

Nearly five months after the Mind Flayer and the death of Bob, Will's happy to finally have a (sort of) normal birthday: spending time with his family, having dinner with his friends, and finally getting Jonathan to talk to him about their mom and Hopper's potential relationship.

Our Normal

Author's Note:

I just think that Will really needs to have a good day, and that he and Jonathan need to spend more time together, so here's some of that.

This is also the beginning of a slow burn Joyce/Hopper arc that's going to run through the rest of this series so stay tuned!

Enjoy!

"Will, sweetie, what do you want to do for your birthday?" Jonathan's mother asked his younger brother at breakfast one morning in mid-March.

Will shrugged. "We don't need to do anything special."

Jonathan laughed and ruffled his brother's hair. "Hey, you only turn fourteen once."

Will smiled at his brother. "I guess it'd be fun to see a movie together or something."

Jonathan grinned. "That sounds great."

"How about having your friends over that night?" their mother asked. "I'll make dinner. It'll be nice."

"Don't go to any trouble, Mom," Will protested, but their mother shook her head.

"It's no trouble. And I'll ask Hopper and El to come, and I'll get him to help out." She smiled at the thought.

Jonathan exchanged glances with Will.

Ever since Will had been trapped in the Upside Down a year and a half before, Hopper had been spending a lot of time with their

mother. Jonathan knew that with everything their mom had gone through it was important for her to have another adult around to talk to and to go to when something happened with Will. Hopper was a good man, and they knew that he would do anything for their mom.

The appearance of Bob the previous year had been slightly awkward, both because the boys weren't used to their mom having a boyfriend and because Jonathan had been expecting that something might happen between their mom and Hopper. They'd gotten used to Bob eventually, Will conceding that he liked the man while Jonathan was just glad to see his mom happy after everything that had happened. Bob was a good guy too – kind of generic and boring (if his love of Kenny Rodgers was any indication) – but he always kind and sweet to their mother.

Since his death, their mother had been harder, more prone to long silences and staring into space for hours on end. She was overjoyed to have Will back and seeming more normal than he had since before he was taken to the Upside Down a year and a half ago, but the cost of their survival seemed to weigh more heavily on her than anything Jonathan had ever seen. She always tried to stay happy around the boys, and Jonathan knew that while that happiness was sometimes real, far more than Jonathan would have liked she was just putting on a happy face so that Will wouldn't have to deal with anything else on top of the trauma he had already experienced.

The only other times when Jonathan saw his mom genuinely happy were when she was with Hopper. The chief understood her grief, and he'd been by her side through everything. Several times since December Jonathan had woken up in the middle of the night to hear his mom out in the kitchen speaking in hushed tones to someone on the telephone. When Jonathan poked his head out he would see his mother, panicked, one arm wrapped around herself and the other clutching the phone as though it was a lifeline. She would slowly start to breathe more evenly, relax, maybe smile, and once Jonathan heard her laugh. But always just before she went back to bed she'd end the call with "Thank you, Hop," and Jonathan would close his door as quietly as possible before sinking back into bed, grateful that his mom wasn't alone.

One night Jonathan had woken up not to the sound of his mother but

to the sound of the telephone. His mother had hurried down the hallway before Jonathan cracked the door open and heard his mother help the Hawkins police chief just like he always helped her.

It scared Jonathan a little bit to be honest, that his mother and the chief had grown so reliant on each other. This was serious. After everything their dad had done to their family, Jonathan was hesitant to want someone else to be part of it. Bob had been easier. He was nice, but kind of harmless, sweet but not permanent. Bob made Jonathan's mother happy, but it was always a sort of superficial happiness, just by the nature of their relationship. Bob was an escape from the reality of their lives; Jonathan could never see him as a part of that reality.

But Hopper... Hopper could be something else entirely. Jonathan knew that if something happened between his mom and the chief, it wouldn't be just a harmless, happy escape. It would be deeper and more meaningful, but with a lot more potential for pain and heartbreak, especially now that Hopper had El.

But Jonathan knew there was no use in worrying about Hopper at this point. Bob was still fresh in the mind of his mother (and probably in Hopper's mind too), and Jonathan also knew that the chief was so reserved in his feelings that there was a good chance that nothing would ever actually happen. Regardless, Hopper was a comfort to their mother, and however that ended up working out, anyone who made their mother start to smile more and cry less was worth it. And it was nothing to concern Will about. The kid had enough on his plate without worrying about their mother and the Hawkins police chief.

Jonathan broke Will's gaze, and Will sighed to himself. It had taken Will a while to recover from the Mind Flayer, but that didn't mean he needed to be constantly protected. Will knew that Jonathan was always worrying about everything – his mom, money, him, and lately Hopper (though Will had determined that that was less of a worry for Jonathan and more of a source of uncertainty). Now that he and Nancy were together, Jonathan seemed happier than he had ever been, but Will knew that his older brother still had a lot on his mind.

Back before everything, Jonathan had tried to protect Will from their parents fighting or fears about money, but by the time Will had turned thirteen, Jonathan had started opening up a little bit more, letting Will into some of his concerns about their mother so they could help her together. But after the Upside Down, Jonathan had locked it all up again. Will knew that Jonathan felt like he was the only “okay” one out of the family, with Will still having nightmares and their mother wrapped up in continued worries about Will, so Jonathan did what he had always done – he took care of everything. Will loved his brother so much, and he was so grateful for the sacrifices that Jonathan had made, but things were different now. Will was doing better every day, and Jonathan needed to know that he didn’t have to carry everything himself.

Will set his concerns about Jonathan aside for the moment, focusing instead on how nice it was to eat breakfast with his family. It was a good day. Will had only briefly visited the Upside Down in his dreams last night, and nothing had happened, just a few flashes of Castle Byers – memories from his time trapped there, mixed in with El’s voice. It was a dream that Will himself deemed “normal,” or at least normal for him. Sometimes his nightmares were much worse – friends screaming for him to save him, his mother shaking him as the Mind Flayer swallowed him whole – but his “episodes” where he found himself in the Upside Down while he was awake had stopped completely. Will liked to think that the Mind Flayer was afraid of him now after his mom, Jonathan, and Nancy had burned it out of him that night in the cabin. It made him feel like he was a superhero, Zombie Boy: the one great fear of the Shadow Monster (though Will knew that the Mind Flayer had a lot more to fear from El, who had actually expelled it from their world, than from him).

The conversation turned to movies and types of birthday cake and Will’s school assignments before Jonathan had to go to work, leaving Will to catch up on homework and finish some drawings while his mom took care of some housework. A regular Saturday, exactly how Will liked it.

The week passed in a similar fashion, a couple bad nights for Will and one for his mom (Will knew Jonathan always listened to his mom’s phone calls with Hopper, but Will usually just fell back asleep

when he heard his mother get up, knowing that she would be okay), but nothing was too terrible.

Will woke up the morning of his birthday to the smell of pancakes and bacon from the kitchen.

Jonathan was at the stove, humming to himself, carefree and smiling.

“Morning, Jonathan,” Will greeted his brother.

“Happy Birthday, little bro!” Jonathan replied, coming over to give him a hug.

“Will!” their mother’s voice came from behind them. “Happy Birthday, sweetheart!”

“Thanks guys.” Will beamed at his family as Jonathan got plates for each of them.

They spent the morning lazily watching TV and talking, since both his mom and Jonathan had taken the day off. After lunch, Jonathan and Will went off to the movie theater, their mom insisting that she didn’t want to come and that they needed to have some time just the two of them.

The boys had a great time, talking and laughing and Jonathan having Will listen to some new bands on the way into town. The movie was good, but the time with just his older brother was better.

After the film, Jonathan asked Will if he wanted to walk around town, just for something to do.

Will readily agreed, and the pair wandered down Main Street peering in shop windows and exchanging thoughts about the movie.

They had almost made it down to a record store that Jonathan wanted to peek inside of when a police cruiser pulled up beside them.

“Happy Birthday, kid,” Hopper’s voice called out of the front seat.

Will smiled up at the chief. "Thanks, Hopper."

"I'll see you both later," Hopper said, a definite smile on his face. "El's really looking forward to it."

Will's smile grew wider. "Me too."

Jonathan nodded at Hopper. "See you, Chief."

The cruiser sped away.

Jonathan and Will walked in silence until they reached the record store, and Jonathan pulled the door open for Will.

Jonathan was flipping through a stack of records when Will finally spoke.

"So what do you think about Mom and Hopper?"

Jonathan almost dropped the record he was holding. "What?"

Will rolled his eyes. "Mom and the Chief," he repeated. "I know your worried about something, you can talk to me you know."

Jonathan looked sheepish. "Yeah, I know, Will. I just didn't want to bother you about anything else with everything that happened."

Will sighed exasperatedly. "How many times do I have to tell you that I'm okay and that I'd really much rather you treat me like I'm normal... or as close to normal as we all can manage."

Jonathan cracked a smile at Will's words. "You're right, I'm sorry. You have as much stake in this as I do."

"Thank you," Will said, relaxing and turning to look through a display of cassettes.

"I don't really know how I feel about Hopper," Jonathan said after a few minutes. "He's done so much to help Mom, but it seems really big somehow, bigger than things ever were with Bob." Jonathan stopped after Bob's name.

Will nodded. "Yeah. It's different. It's definitely not like Bob."

The boys didn't speak again until they left the store and started to walk back towards Jonathan's car.

"I like him though," Will said quietly, almost to himself.

Jonathan smiled slightly. "Yeah, I think I like him too."

There was another lengthy silence as the boys drove back home.

"Don't say anything to Mom about Hopper though," Jonathan finally said as they approached the end of their road.

Will nodded. "Gotta let the adults work things out for themselves."

Jonathan laughed.

"Thanks for talking to me about this," Will said, turning to his older brother seriously. "It makes things really feel like they're back to normal... or-"

"Our version of normal," Jonathan finished for him, smiling back at Will. "It is nice to be on the same page with you about all this. Thanks for making me talk to you."

Will grinned. "Anytime."

The pair got out of the car and walked inside and were greeted by the unmistakable smell of freshly baked cake.

"Smells great, Mom," Jonathan called into the kitchen.

"Hey boys!" she called back. "How was the movie?"

Will and Jonathan exchanged grins. "It was really good."

Their mom soon joined them in the living room, which was cleaner than it had been before they had gone to town. "Everyone should be here in an hour or so. Can Jonathan and I give you your presents before things get too crazy?"

Will beamed up at his mom, and she and Jonathan left and returned

with a few wrapped boxes.

Will opened the quickly to find new paper and crayons and a VHS tape from his mother plus a few cassettes from Jonathan.

“It’s nothing too big,” his mother worried over him, “but-”

“Thank you so much,” Will cut off his mother. “Both of you. This is great.”

It wasn’t long before a troop of kids arrived at the Byers’ door, Lucas, Mike, and Dustin having biked to Will’s together, with Max riding on the back of Lucas’s bike so she didn’t have to skate the whole way over.

The kids quickly settled in, exclaiming over the new VHS and arguing about everything, except Mike who kept glancing furtively at the door, clearly waiting for the arrival of the last member of their party.

Twenty minutes later the sound of tires on the gravel driveway made Mike spring out of his seat and about two seconds after Will’s mom opened the door, Mike was hand in hand with his girlfriend.

“Happy Birthday, Will,” El said sweetly from between her father and her boyfriend.

“Thanks, El! I’m so glad you’re here,” Will replied, standing up to greet his friend. Will and El had never formally met each other until after she defeated the Mind Flayer, but the pair had instantly taken to each other, their experiences with the Upside Down serving as a bond between them.

Mike pulled El toward the other kids sitting on the floor, and Will followed with a quick glance back to see his mom laugh at something Hopper said, her hand resting lightly on the chief’s forearm.

Standing in the hallway, Will saw Jonathan watching their mom too.

Jonathan glanced over at Will and raised his eyebrows slightly.

Will smiled and shrugged slightly, a silent acknowledgement of their decision to let their mom and Hopper figure things out in their own

time.

Jonathan nodded back with a smile of his own and then walked forward to greet the chief himself.

Will's mom, Jonathan, and Hopper made dinner, though Will saw Jonathan make every excuse to give the other two their privacy, choosing to set the table and get drinks rather than engage in the actual cooking.

The six kids ate dinner happily, the chatter and excitement never ceasing. After dinner was cake and then presents from his friends – games and another movie and a package of nice colored pencils from El and Hopper – and then an argument naturally broke out over which movie to watch as the adults, Jonathan, and Will cleared the table.

“Dad?” El came into the kitchen to talk to Hopper.

Hopper's face softened at the word. “What's up, kid?”

“Do you think I could stay over tonight?” she asked shyly. “Max is staying and my friends...” She trailed off and looked up into her father's eyes.

Hopper sighed. “Fine, as long as it's okay with Joyce.”

“Oh we'd love to have you stay, El,” Will's mom said quickly, smiling at the girl.

A brilliant smile burst onto El's face as she gave her father a hug. “Thank you so much, Dad.” She ran back to the other kids, exclaiming that she was staying for her first sleepover.

“You'll keep an eye on her, right Joyce?” Hopper asked in a low voice that Will could only barely hear.

His mother smiled softly back at the chief. “Of course I will, Hop. You know that.”

The chief visibly relaxed and returned to washing dishes.

Hopper didn't leave until almost ten, and Will almost asked him if he'd like to stay but thought better of it. The hug Will saw the chief give his mother on the front porch was enough for now.

Jonathan slipped out not long after the chief, nodding to his mother and Will, both knowing he was going over to Nancy's for the night.

The boys watched the movie they had finally decided on until, piled all around the Byers living room, the six party members fell asleep.

Noises from the kitchen woke up Will the next morning. He shifted under his blanket, slightly confused about where he was before he remembered that it had been his birthday and that he and his friends had fallen asleep watching a movie. He sat up and leaned back against the couch next to him, rubbing his eyes. The couch was occupied by a sleeping El, her hand hanging down to the ground where it was inches from Mike's hand as he slept soundly beside her. Max, Lucas, and Dustin were spread out across the rest of the floor, Lucas curled closer to Max either to get closer to her or to get away from Dustin's snoring. Probably both.

After a moment Will got up to find his mother in the kitchen, moving around as quietly as she could with a small smile on her face.

"Morning, Mom," Will said softly.

His mother's smile grew wider at his words. "Hey sweetie. How was the movie? How'd you sleep?"

"It was good," Will replied, trying to rub the sleepiness from his eyes. "And I slept... really well actually."

Will was a little surprised at this realization. As much as he loved sleepovers with his friends, sleeping on the floor was never the most comfortable. But even with the stiffness in his legs, he knew this was the best he'd slept in a while.

"No nightmares," Will continued, turning to smile up at his mother. "Nothing with the Upside Down at all."

She pulled him into a hug, and Will could feel her relax.

"It does get a little bit easier every day, doesn't it?" she said as she released him, her words hopeful but laced with sadness.

"Yeah I think it does, Mom," Will replied, hugging her quickly again.

There would always be specters looming in their house. There would be more nightmares for both of them, and probably for Jonathan too. Will's drawing of Bob Newby: Superhero still hung from the wall beside them, reminding them all of what they'd lost, but Will was still there and his mom was still there and all his friends sleeping in the other room were still there too.

The sound of gravel on the driveway made Will and his mom both look up. They were greeted by the familiar sight of a Hawkins police cruiser.

"I invited Hopper over for breakfast," Will's mother explained. "He didn't like leaving El last night."

Will nodded, knowing how protective the police chief had become over his adopted daughter.

"And I wanted some help wrangling you kids now that there's six of you instead of just four," his mother added, laughing.

Will turned to roll his eyes at his mother, but at that moment Dustin and Lucas both stormed into the kitchen arguing about something while Max trailed behind them telling them both to shut up because it was way too early for this.

"God Joyce I'd forgotten how loud they all are," Hopper's voice joined the mix as he stepped inside.

Will saw his mother laugh, relaxing even more now that the chief had arrived.

Will knew things would never go back to the way they were, but as his friends bickered (and Mike and El crept quietly into the kitchen holding hands) and his mom seemed more at peace than she had been since October, Will found that he could actually believe that things were going to be okay. And that maybe some things would turn out even better than they were before.

Author's Note:

Thanks for reading!

Comments and Kudos are so appreciated! <3